

Legal Assistance Resource Center **♦ of Connecticut, Inc. ♦**

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Testimony of Raphael L. Podolsky **Public Housing bills**

Housing Committee public hearing -- March 1, 2011

H.B. 6461 -- Selection of tenant commissioners

SUPPORT

The General Assembly approved this bill last year by votes of 29-5 in the Senate and 104-42 in the House. Unfortunately, it was vetoed by the Governor and did not become law. We urge the General Assembly to reenact the bill this year.

Under existing law -- both federal and state -- one member of every housing authority board of commissioners must be a tenant of the housing authority. Appointments are made by the mayor or the town council. The purpose of the requirement for a tenant member is to make sure that the residents of public housing have a voice in the setting of housing authority policies. It is not uncommon, however, that tenants have no voice in the selection of the tenant commissioner or that the tenant commissioner has little connection to the resident council (if there is one) or to the concerns of most other tenants.

This bill allows the tenants to select the tenant commissioner, either through a representative resident council or through an election. If there is no recognized town-wide resident council and no petition for an election, the bill leaves the existing appointment procedure in place. Given the nature of resident organization, it is anticipated that elections will be held in only a small number of housing authorities in any given year. The change in the process, however, will greatly increase the likelihood that the tenant commissioner will in fact be a voice for tenant perspectives and interests and will thereby much better accomplish the reason for having a tenant as a member of the housing authority board.

The bill also removes a conflict of interest provision that is directly contrary to federal law.

S.B. 1075 -- Public housing grievance procedures

SUPPORT

In 1989, the General Assembly adopted Gen. Stats. §8-68f, which protects the rights of tenants in state public housing. Tenants in federal public housing had long had such rights. DECD was directed to adopt uniform minimum standards for lease and grievance procedures. Eleven years later, when DECD had still not adopted any minimum standards, the statute was amended to make clear that housing authorities had to comply with the requirements of §8-68f (e.g., to provide tenants with the right to file a grievance and be heard on the grievance), even if DECD failed to promulgate standards. It also required housing authorities with both state and federal public housing to use their federal grievance procedures in their state public housing. Now, another 11 years later -- 22 years from the original statute -- no DECD standards are yet promulgated, although DECD has made on-and-off efforts to develop them. This bill sets a schedule by which DECD must complete these long-overdue model lease and grievance standards.

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**S.B. 1076 -- Resident participation in public housing
revitalization**

**SUPPORT with
amendment**

This bill is designed to assure tenant participation when "major physical transformation or disposition" of their public housing development occurs. Such transformations are sometimes called "revitalizations," to distinguish them from lesser forms of rehabilitation or repair. This bill requires that the housing authority, the tenant association, the developer, and the ultimate post-transformation owner (if the latter two entities are different from the housing authority) enter into an agreement establishing the method by which residents and resident organizations will participate in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of the transformation activities. The bill also requires the housing authority to make reasonable efforts to provide residents with resources related to outreach, training, organizing, and legal rights. We support the bill, and we also support the amendment recommended by the Public Housing Resident Network, which would make explicit that the agreement must include a written plan that sets forth a specific and on-going process that will produce genuine resident participation.